

**THE OPPRESSIVE ROLE OF
WOMEN**

*Pearl
Vambrace*

SALTERTON TRILOGY

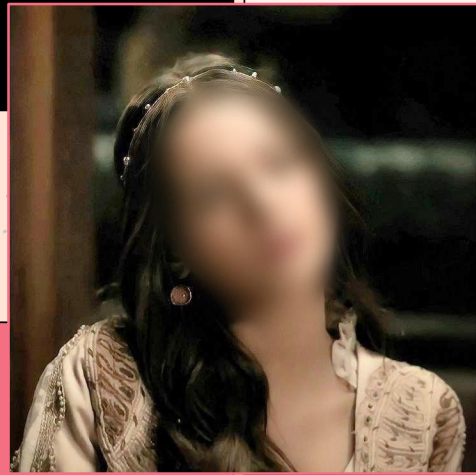


Table of Contents

01 **THESIS**

02 **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

03 **CLAIM #1**
Tempest-Tost

04 **CLAIM #2**
Leaven of Malice

05 **CLAIM #3**
A Mixture of Frailties

06 **CRITIC STATEMENTS**

07 **CLASS DISCUSSION**
Give and Go Questions

08 **CONCLUSION**

THESIS



The depiction of women in the Salterton Trilogy, specifically Pearl Vambrace, demonstrates how women navigated multiple challenges of gender oppression in a 1950s Canadian society, thus highlighting Robertson Davies' narrative framing that marginalizes women to the detriment of their development.

Historical Context

Destiny of a 1950s Woman

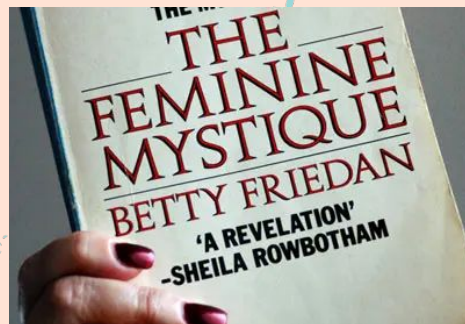
Women were taught to have "no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity" (Friedan 3)

The Expectations of a 1950s Women

Women were forced into a gender stereotype where they were expected to catch a man, raise children, cook for the family, keep a clean house, and "pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents" (Friedan 3-4)

The Sacrifice of a 1950s Woman

Essentially, all women "had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children." (Friedan 4)



Tempest-Test

Pearl's character is centered around men, and has close to no autonomy.

"Pearl represents an unrecognized and unappreciated value." (Hoy 75)



"With her intelligent conversation, reliance on her own spiritual resources, and 'the still, expectant look of one listening to an inner voice,' Pearl ... embodies spiritual possibilities extending considerably beyond the deceptively uninspiring physical reality." (Hoy 75)

ROGER'S OPINION

"Roger eyed [Pearl] professionally, reflecting that this was a little more the sort of thing he had been expecting." (Davies 57)

"Her father had taught her to talk, as he said, intelligently, but she was not convinced that this would be allurements enough for Roger Tasset." (Davies 73)

THE BALL

What had she done that was wrong? Was it breath...or was it dullness, or lack of sex appeal which nothing in the world could ever put right? (Davies 138)

WALTER VAMBRACE

"Submissive to her father..." (Davies 72)

"The constant need for a perfect, orderly family home comes at the expense of the children not being able to achieve their full potential." ("Canadian" 2)



Leaven of Malice

Pearl's characterization in *Leaven of Malice* positions her with more independence than previously, but she still faces oppression and dictation from the men in her life.



"Father, I'm over twenty-one. You can't defend me that way... Nonsense. You don't know anything about law....How can you speak so ungratefully, Pearl? I know what must be done. You are still very much a child." (Davies 126).

Vambrace Infantilizing Pearl

"he despised his cousin-in-law's vocabulary, and detested... hearing... his daughter called... Pearl" (Davies 80)

"Damn it all," said he, "Haven't you any name but Pearl? I've got a saint's name," she said. "Veronica." "That's a little better," said Solly, and kissed her again." (Davies 256)

Pearl Vs Veronica

"Solly was weary of feminine illogicality, and was delighted to see a fellow man, with whom he could argue in a reasonable manner" (Davies 164)

"Well if that isn't the most nauseating feminine attitude I've ever heard!" (Davies 242).

Solly's Misogyny

A Mixture of Frailties

Pearl's New, but Familiar, Role

The Good Daughter-Law

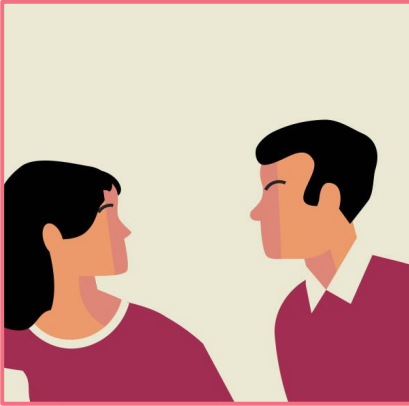
"I tried; I really did try. I slaved for her as I never slaved for my own mother. I did all I could to make her feel our marriage was a good thing for Solly" (Davies 11).

Housewife

"They had grown poorer, trying to keep up the house, and old Ethel, on his modest university lecturer's salary" (Davies 227).

Just the Wife

"I think, dear, that it would be better if you were not present at the trustee's meetings...we must avoid any appearance of impropriety...Veronica retired to another room with a red face, and a sense that she had been presumptuous" (Davies 53)



Subservient to Solly

"She had small relish for the task before her; but she had undertaken it on behalf of her husband." (Davies 309)

Her Worth is Decided by Men

"Nearly two years had passed since the reading of Mrs. Bridgetower's will, and so far there was no sign that [Pearl] might have a child, and retrieve the Bridgetower money for her husband." (Davies 169)

Secondary to an Unborn Boy

"Solly is a drudge, and I'm a baby-factory, bound to go on and on, until we have a son." (Davies 311)



Critic Statements

Source 1: *Conversations with Robertson Davies* edited by J. Madison Davis

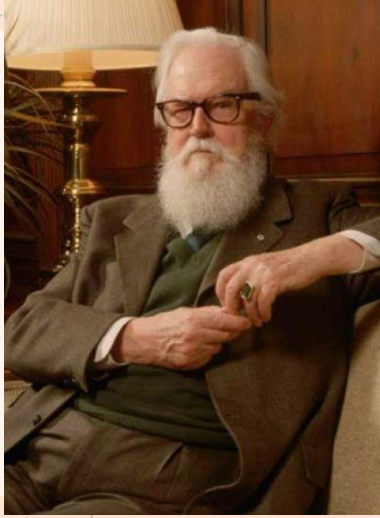
"I am fascinated by women and enormously appreciative of them, but I don't think that they are men... to try to educate her along masculine lines and treat her as though she were a man is to ignore what she is" (Davis 123).

Source 2: *Shakespeare's Boy Actors* by Robertson Davies

"Woman's great art is to lie low and let the imagination of the male endow her with depths" (qtd. in "Shakespeare's" 200)

Discussion Question:

After hearing how Davies viewed women, which characters in any of the novels do you think support his views or who do you think contests them?



Discussion Time!

- Do you think readers in the 1950's took as much offence to the portrayal of women in Davies' novels, as contemporary readers could take today?

Conclusion



Miranda and the Tempest by John William Waterhouse)

Throughout the Salterton trilogy, Pearl reflects the typical 1950s Canadian woman as she navigates the many ways she is oppressed by men because of her gender, illuminating Robertson's Davies narrative techniques, which insinuate the marginalization of women.

1. In *Tempest-Tost*, Pearl's characterization is dependent on men, demonstrating her lack of autonomy.
2. In *Leaven of Malice*, Pearl appears to find independence, but, in actuality, she is still dismissed and infantilized because of her gender and men believing they have authority over her.
3. In *Mixture of Frailties*, Pearl becomes a wife struggling to adhere to the gender expectations of the role, highlighting her perpetuated subservience to the men and lack of agency.

Thus, Davies, through his depiction of Pearl, shares his own beliefs on women by consistently portraying Pearl as dictated by men and society's oppressive feminine stereotypes.

Works Cited

Davies, Robertson. *A Mixture of Fraillties*. Penguin Books, 1983.

Davies, Robertson. *Leaven of Malice*. Penguin Books, 1980.

Davies, Robertson. *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*. J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1939, pp. 200.

Davies, Robertson. *Tempest Tost*. Penguin Books, 1980.

Friedan, Betty. "The Problem That Has No Name." *The Feminine Mystique*, Ladies Home Journal, 1963, pp. 3–5, nationalhumanitiescenter.org/ows/seminars/tcentury/FeminineMystique.pdf.

Hoy, Helen. "Poetry in the Dunghill: The Romance of the Ordinary in Robertson Davies' Fiction." *Ariel. A Review of International English Literature Calgary*, vol. 10, 1979, pp. 66–98.

Madison, J. *Conversations with Robertson Davies*. University Press of Mississippi, 1989, p. 123, books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Ho4UCGI0HTMC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=%22Robertson+Davies%22+and+women&ots=dwBDQIO5Lp&sig=AAX3GtMrNzr6c9FLcgXSxDWYgOQ#v=onepage&q=women&f=false.

The Canadian Family. Canada's Pursuit of Prosperity and Search for Security, WordPress Foundation, 8 Apr. 2013, canadianprosperityandsecurity1.wordpress.com/the-canadian-family/the-canadian-family/.